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CREATION OF A NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL BOARD  
FOR  
LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT

by

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U.S. Army War College  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013  
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In order to prepare for these conflicts, the US needs to establish an appropriate national security strategy for low intensity conflicts (LIC) in the third world. The President was tasked by Congress to establish a board on the National Security Council (NSC) to create the LIC strategy. This Board has yet to be created as a functioning body. This article addresses the criticisms of US LIC policies, proposes a way to establish that policy, and proposes an organization for the yet to be created NSC Board for LIC and Special Operations.

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## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Larry A. Hoff, COL, USAF

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→ The Soviets changed the international environment when they announced their policies of Glasnost and Perestroika. Many Americans believe the proposed Soviet announcements of military cutbacks under this policy should be matched by proportional cutbacks in U.S. military forces. Unfortunately, the Soviet announcements of reducing tensions between the superpowers in the third world have not been matched by their actions. The Soviets continue to support wars of national liberation in the third world and will into the foreseeable future. Conflict in the third world will be inevitable between the U.S. and the Soviets. In order to prepare for these conflicts, the U.S. needs to establish an appropriate national security strategy for low intensity conflicts (LIC) in the third world. The President was tasked by Congress to establish a board on the National Security Council (NSC) to create the LIC strategy. This Board has yet to be created as a functioning body. This article addresses the criticisms of U.S. LIC policies, proposes a way to establish that policy, and proposes an organization for the yet to be created NSC Board for LIC and Special Operations. (edc)



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## INTRODUCTION

The U.S. is faced with a new strategy from our perennial Soviet adversaries. The Soviet Secretary/President Michail Gorbachev has outlined his strategy as Perestroika and Glastnost. Gorbachev's strategy is based on restraint in Soviet international relations while opening his society to changes that will ultimately bring about a Soviet economic resurgence. Gorbachev has advocated a reduction in troop strengths world wide and opening of the Soviet economy to western technology. The Congress and U.S. public generally agree that Gorbachev's new strategy has created a changed international environment between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. They believe the U.S. should reciprocate to the Soviet peace overtures with equal reductions in U.S. military force strengths.

Unfortunately, the Soviet Union has not demonstrated that it is willing to end the competition with the United States. The Soviets are committed by law to support wars of national liberation throughout the world. Even if the Soviets are not directly involved, their principal allies participate in the third world while the Soviets remain in the shadows.

Wars in the third world will continue to occur even if there is a detente between the superpowers. Major regional powers maintain and use huge armies beyond their borders. The Cubans maintained over 50,000 troops in Angola in 1988. They were

opposed by the South African forces in Namibia of almost equal strength. Enough border disputes, religious fundamentalist resurgence, revolutionary zealots, historical hatreds, and ethnic squabbles exist to make wars certain throughout the world. If the superpowers disengage from the tensions of the third world, the old and new regional disputes will be solved without the controls that the superpowers rivalry placed on the warring parties.

The U.S. can join into a dialogue with the Soviet Union on opening their respective societies, but U.S. can't ignore the certainty of conflict in the third world. The spectrum of war that addresses war in the third world is called Low Intensity Conflict (LIC). If the U.S. wants to maintain its position as a world power and protectorate of democracy then it must accept the certainty of conflict in the third world regardless of the outcome of Perestroika and Glastnost, then it must prepare a national strategy for LIC and fund the forces required to accomplish the strategy.

A great debate has taken place in the U.S. this past decade concerning the organization and utilization of U.S. power in LIC. New Commands and organizations were established to solve U.S. problems in the LIC arena. Presidential appointed committees reviewed the problems of using discriminate deterrence in third world conflicts. But through all the review and research no clear U.S. national security strategy for LIC was published. The reason for this past lack of a national effort in LIC strategy is because no national security council level organization has existed that could define, coordinate, and publish a strategy. Although in 1986, Congress directed the President to create a

National Security Council Board for Low Intensity Conflict and Special Operations, the Board does not exist as a functioning entity. If LIC is inevitable and the U.S. remains involved in the third world, then the U.S. must create a structure that will formulate a strategy that will meet these conflicts. In order to accomplish this task, the U.S. must understand the nature of the changing Soviet threat, understand the basic U.S. national security strategy in relation to the Soviet threat, and then review the criticisms of the current problems with U.S. LIC operations. I will briefly cover these topics because they lead to the final and most important missing links in LIC strategy, the creation of a National Security Council Board for Low Intensity Conflict, its organization and responsibilities.

#### **THE CHANGING SOVIET THREAT IN THE ERA OF GLASTNOST AND PERESTROIKA**

The major area of conflict in the past four decades was in the third world. Since World War II, over thirty conventional wars and 100 guerrilla wars and insurgencies have killed over 16 million people. Regardless of motivation of the wars, all of these wars have affected the interests and the citizens of the United States. Most, if not, all of the conflicts were sponsored by the Soviet Union in one way or the other.<sup>1</sup>

#### **THE NEW SOVIET POLICIES**

The new Soviet policies of Glastnost and Perestroika began in 1985. In 1985, Secretary Gorbachev assumed power in the Soviet Union. One of his first acts was to announce the policies of Glastnost and Perestroika. Glastnost is the announced opening of

the Soviet Union to western technology and investment.

Perestroika is a the policy of restructuring the society that will allow criticism and comment within and throughout the Soviet Union about its policies and actions. In February 1986, Secretary Gorbachev announced the Soviet policy of "reasonable sufficiency" in military forces with a reliance on defensive forces only. This policy advocates that the Soviet military will only be defensive in nature and forces will be reduced just enough to promote a defensive posture. In May 1987, Secretary Gorbachev's book "Perestroika" was published in English and released in the United States. The Warsaw Pact consultative committee on military affairs officially adopted the concept of reasonable sufficiency for its forces. Then, Mr. Mathais Rust, a young West German pilot, flew his Cessna 150 light aircraft into Red Square, Moscow. This action caused a shakeup of the Soviet high command. Secretary Gorbachev replaced the old minister of defense with Marshal Yazob. Marshal Yazob is a Gorbachev loyalist who accepts his defense policies. In September 1988, the entire Politburo was reshuffled to positions so that only those who supported Gorbachev were left in power. In October 1988, Secretary Gorbachev assumed the title of President of the Soviet Union in conjunction with the office of First Secretary of the Communist Party. Finally, in December 1988, Gorbachev announced at the United Nations that the Soviet Union would reduce its military by 500,000 men. This announcement stunned the Western democracies.<sup>2</sup>

#### SOVIET SUPPORT TO WARS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION

Soviet assistance to national liberation movements was

incorporated into Article 28 of the revised 1976 Constitution of the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> The wars of national liberation are part of the overall low intensity conflict strategy and doctrine of the Soviet Union. Historically, this form of warfare is pursued generally during periods of peaceful coexistence.<sup>4</sup> The Soviet LIC strategy, especially when coupled with arms sales, was economically beneficial for the Soviet Union when the bills were paid by the recipients.

The Soviet use of their allies as surrogates in actual combat was more effective. In the LICs of Ethiopia and Angola, the use of Cuban troops in support of Marxist-Leninist regimes sustained the African communist regimes against insurgent movements attempting to overthrow them. Most importantly, the Soviet Union can use their allies as surrogates to sustain and support wars of national liberation while maintaining a lower profile for Soviet forces in international conflict.<sup>5</sup> While operating in the shadows behind its allies, the Soviet Union can gain all the benefits of supporting international communism while not directly opposing U.S. interests or forces. In conjunction with its satellite states, the Soviet Union has shown a willingness to absorb the high financial costs of national liberation warfare throughout the world.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, there is little evidence to indicate that the Soviet Union will refrain from this support in the future.<sup>7</sup>

#### SOVIET SURROGATES IN ANGOLA

The clearest example of the Soviet Union policy of supporting clients in regional wars is the war in Angola. In this LIC the Soviet Union was unsuccessful in supporting the forces of the

Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) against the forces of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and South Africa. Because of their bad leadership and lack of military success, the Soviet leaders were replaced by Cubans for another try. In late 1987, the Cubans increased their presence in Angola from 35,000 to 50,000 troops. For the first time the Cubans committed their troops to direct combat action against the South Africans. At the conclusion of the July 1988 campaign, the Cubans pushed the South Africans back into Namibia and poised thousands of troops on the border threatening to liberate Namibia.<sup>8</sup> The conclusion of this LIC was resolved by a treaty that has the South Africans granting independence to Namibia, leaving that country, and ending support to the UNITA anti-communist movement.

The disturbing theme of using Cuban forces in the Angolan war was their increase in troop strength and that resultant combat action occurred independently of Soviet approval. The Cubans assumed the standard of leadership. They moved forces on Soviet airlift and actively engaged them in combat against UNITA and South Africa. They used Soviet military equipment, and they criticized the Soviet military support given to Angola up to that point. The Soviet Union supported the Cuban's action only after it started and then hailed its success.<sup>9</sup>

The implications of a massive Cuban military force inserted and then employed in a third world conflict have far reaching implications. The international prestige gained by Fidel Castro is significantly enhanced. Now, Cuban interests in the Angolan

region affect any new settlements. The Soviet Union created a strong military and political force in one of its surrogates. Cuba can now act for the Soviet Union with maximum force and the Soviet Union won't be directly involved<sup>10</sup> Finally, the Cuban intervention changed the strategic balance in southern Africa and led to an agreement on Angola. <sup>11</sup>

#### **U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY**

The U.S. does have a national strategy based on clearly stated positions. President Reagan outlined the National Security Strategy of the United States in a pamphlet in January 1988. This pamphlet stated the U.S. interests, objectives, threats, and elements of power that form the U.S. national policies. Through these elements, the U.S. establishes national security strategy which is articulated in domestic and foreign policy. When juxtaposed with the dynamics of a changing world, the national security strategy is continually updated and changed accounting for new situations and opposing forces. Through understanding the U.S. national strategy and the changing nature of the Soviet threat to that strategy, a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the U.S. national security structure is obtainable.<sup>12</sup>

#### **CRITICISMS OF U.S. STRATEGY AND POLICY IN LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT**

##### **THE U.S. PROBLEM WITH LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT**

Since the 1947 Department of Defense Reorganization Act, the U.S. has struggled with conflict resolution in the third world. Past U.S. struggle was focused on the Soviet threat and the

defense of Europe. The problems associated with East-West confrontation, especially in Europe, received the major emphasis by U.S. writers of strategy and doctrine. The U.S. military was structured to fight the Soviet Union in a nuclear, European environment.<sup>13</sup>

During the past four decades, the U.S. was involved only in third world LICs. The U.S. strategy, doctrine, and tactics designed for Europe were applied during each U.S. LIC involvement. Conventional war strategies and doctrines do not apply to LICs. The U.S. experience in LICs challenge the use of conventional forces, strategy, and doctrine. The reason for the challenge is because the center of gravity in LICs is not the enemy military as in conventional war, but the political and social structure of the challenged nation.<sup>14</sup>

Involvement in wars in the third world are contrary to the U.S. national character. LIC is not a traditional method of warfare and therefore doesn't fit into the traditional teachings and planning of diplomatic and military professionals. LIC is political and economic in nature. LICs are long in duration and require a national will that can endure the length of the conflict. Because of the changing nature of a prolonged LIC, winning requires a constant adaptation to new situations and constant review of the objectives and strategy to insure the goals are attainable. Strategic vision is required before entering a LIC. Vision assists in maintaining a sustained focus on the initial objectives which precludes diversion to goals that weren't in the original plan. During the last four decades, the U.S. overlooked all of these axioms of vision, focus, and

reflection on strategy, objectives, and doctrine.

#### LIC DEFINITION

The major challenge with LIC lies in establishing a acceptable definition that truly defines its parameters. The following definition appropriately covers the spectrum of LIC:

#### LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT

Low intensity conflicts consists of protracted struggles that are characterized by competing ideologies, a combination of psychological-political tactics, internal stresses, and paramilitary means. Generally, low intensity conflict embraces insurgency, counterinsurgency, resistance to the imposition of totalitarian regimes, terrorism, and covert operations, as well as peacetime contingencies, including peacekeeping operations.<sup>15</sup>

#### POLITICAL-ECONOMIC-SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF LIC

U.S. strategic planners must grasp the political-economic-sociological aspects of this definition when devising LIC strategy for national security. The U.S. history of utilizing conventional military means to fight LICs is inconsistent with these definitions for three reasons. First, LICs have expended U.S. men and equipment, in environments for which they were not prepared to fight. Secondly, contrary to national ideals, the U.S. may have to take on the role of occupation forces. Finally, using conventional forces and taking the associated casualties may affect the U.S. resolve in the long term.<sup>16</sup>

## CRITICISMS OF U.S. LIC STRATEGY IN EL SALVADOR

U.S. LIC policy, strategy and doctrine are directly linked to the overall national security strategy. LIC military operations can not operate in isolation from the other national security instruments of power.<sup>17</sup>

The most recent U.S. example of LIC operating in isolation from national strategy is the U.S. involvement in El Salvador. U.S. support in El Salvador began with commitment to the Reagan Doctrine. The Reagan Doctrine reiterated the policy that the U.S. would not tolerate any new communist military inspired insurgencies in Central America. Involvement in El Salvador began as support for a endangered friendly democracy threatened by a Nicaraguan-Cuban supported insurgency. U.S. support was not coordinated between military, diplomatic and economic agencies which were all providing simultaneous aid. No clear objectives, plan, or consideration for available resources were identified prior to involvement. Fundamentally, the U.S. agencies have improvised required doctrine, tactics, and strategy for the past nine years in a vacuum without strategic guidance.<sup>18</sup>

Lack of a coordinated State Department, DOD, or USAID plan for El Salvador has left that country with a stalemated war with no end in sight. The Ambassador and the Country Team must control every U.S. asset in the country.<sup>19</sup> The U.S. military advisor team was not allowed to become involved in any operation that might draw casualties. This policy limited the level and clarity of advice the U.S. military could provide to the Salvadorian military, because advisors could not actually see them operate in combat.<sup>20</sup> The U.S. military and State Department have no control

over funds for Security Assistance or the funds of USAID. Thus, no coherent policy by the U.S. Country Team is possible.<sup>21</sup>

**THE NSC BOARD FOR LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS**  
**BACKGROUND**

Because of the failures in operations and slow development of LIC, Congress established new agencies to manage the special operations forces. Although the primary Act concerning LIC was passed by the 99th Congress in the 1987 Department of Defense Authorization Act. The Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act, an amendment to the DOD Authorization Act of 1987, directed the President to establish within the NSC the power and staff to deal strategically with LIC operations below conventional war. This Act directed the President through the NSC to focus strategically on terrorism, political sabotage, subversion, insurgency and paramilitary criminality. <sup>22</sup> When formed, the Board is tasked to account for the changing Soviet strategy, applying U.S. national strategy to LIC, and accounting for the criticisms of U.S. LIC problems. The following is my proposal for the organization of the NSC Board for Low Intensity Conflict and Special Operations.

**PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION**

The purpose of the NSC Board is to establish national security strategy for Low Intensity Conflict, coordinate with all affected national agencies for changes and implementation, maintain liaison with Congress for consensus, exploit the U.S. advantages in technology, apply the approved strategy to LIC in affected

regions of the world, and to maintain a contingency operations capability during crisis. In order to achieve these missions, the Board must report directly and regularly to the National Security Council on all matters pertaining to LIC. The only echelon of command above the Board chairman is the National Security Advisor to the President. This organization will enable the principle advisor to the President for National Security affairs to debate the Board's recommendations and strategies. The Board will coordinate lesser strategy, policy and staff actions with the other committees on the NSC staff. The Chairman of the Board will serve as a principal advisor to the NSC in order for the Board to directly provide information to the chief advisors to the President. (see Attachment 1 for organizational chart)

The Board should be comprised of five sub-committees. The Congressional Liaison sub-committee is responsible for coordinating all actions with appropriate members of Congress. This coordination is in conjunction with existing Presidential-Congressional liaison functions but will focus only on LIC matters. The Strategy Development and Coordination sub-committee will create, monitor, coordinate and update the existing national security strategy for LIC. A Regional Studies sub-committee will monitor activities in the regions of the world, coordinate with other governmental agencies for information, and make recommendations for strategy creation or update as necessary. Qualified engineers in the Technology Review sub-committee will investigate and exploit emerging and existing U.S. technology for application in Low Intensity Conflict. Finally, the Current Operations sub-committee will maintain worldwide watch on crisis

situations and manage these crises for the President as his staff support for a contingency response team.

#### BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Selection of key communicators to serve on the NSC board on SO/LIC is essential to successfully operating at the national policy level. The people who are members of the NSC and Congress are equal in status but unequal in power. The term "first among equals" applies to all political committee members who are effective in Washington. The members of the NSC board on SO/LIC must be in this category. They need to function in a equal manner with all Congressmen, intelligence organizations, and the military. The members' intelligence, experience, and ability to influence must overwhelmingly convince the entire Washington community of their ability to get the job done. Their sense of mission must be consistent with national priorities. This means selecting people who are national figures in the academic community, military community, economic community, communications, and intelligence communities. They need experience in their profession that identify them as the strategic experts for thinking and action in their fields. Finally, the members of the NSC board on SO/LIC must be able to communicate their ideas and strategies in a manner that will gain support of the U.S. citizens to sustain a lengthy involvement in third world conflicts.

#### NSC LIC AGENDA

The agenda for the NSC board on SO/LIC must initially develop

an outline for LIC strategy. The Board must then gain consensus on this strategy with the Congress and the Administration.

Acceptance of the LIC strategy by all the key Washington communicators is the beginning of the agenda.

After acceptance the Board must review these strategic policies on a scheduled basis. A criticism of the U.S. LIC effort in El Salvador was the lack of continuing review of national policy after the policy was implemented. This lack of policy review led to complacency in insuring the objectives were being pursued and in evaluating whether the objectives were still valid. The Board needs to insure that the LIC policies are consistent with changing national priorities and interests. If they are not, then the Board will recommend changes in the strategy accordingly. The Board's next task is to communicate these policies to the appropriate agencies for execution. A short list of affected agencies includes: Department of State (DOS), Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Treasury (DOT), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), United States Information Agency (USIA), Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Department of Justice (DOJ), United States Immigration Service (USIS), and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

One Presidential committee recommendation on LIC suggests that the first and primary task of the board is the creation of a "National Technology Plan." This plan would establish priorities for continuity of effort amongst governmental agencies in military and non-military matters. The National Technology Plan would provide collective proponents and identify/task lead

agencies, and would outline their duties. The Board would manage the tasked agencies' workload and review the plan for national appropriateness on a regular basis.<sup>23</sup> This method enables the Board to project current and future technologies into existing and changing strategy while controlling its dissemination.

#### LIC EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

A key initial task of the Board is defining the parameters of LIC that are acceptable to the citizens of the United States. After these parameters are defined then the Board must initiate a program of educating the U.S. citizens on the aspects of the spectrum of Low Intensity Conflict. The program of education must consider all the features of LIC so the people understand what instruments of national power are available and how they are used. LIC resources include people, technology, systems, organizations, policies, mediums, and energy of the entire nation. National consensus and education on LIC are necessary before final planning of strategy and doctrine. When the national will is ascertained the Congress must coordinate with the results and on the process of educating the nation on the use of power and involvement in LIC.

#### SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE SYSTEM

The Board must continually review all the existing concepts, organizations, and resources to insure that the national strategy is attainable and consistent with the changing situation. The Board has to question every strategy, doctrine, and tactic in a dynamic systematic process that accounts for the national

objectives. Then the Board must categorize and systematize new concepts to use existing and forecast LIC resources in the regional environments. All institutions and individuals involved in the special operations missions need to be scrutinized for value and dedication to unorthodox and unconventional methods of completing objectives. Anything predictable within the LIC system is questionable when it becomes conventional and quantifiable. This doesn't mean predictable strategies and methods are of no value; only, that the Board should know when they are producing predictable and conventional operations. The success of the LIC strategy depends on instituting the deceptive policy "inconsistent consistency" when and where it is applicable. The ability to adapt to a situation, without the adversary knowing when and where changes are made, is critical in the unconventional warfare and psychological operations portions of LIC.

#### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The United States is faced with a dynamic and changing world. The new initiatives by the Soviet Union to open their economy and reorganize their system created a new dialogue between the superpowers concerning international tensions. The potential exists to lessen the tensions between the superpowers and reduce confrontation in the third world. Is the United States prepared for these changes of the next decades?

The President of the United States published the national security strategy, interests and objectives for the country to follow. These policies include providing for defending the

survival of the nation, promoting world order, encouraging free trade and markets, and promoting the American ideals of human freedom and dignity throughout the world. All the instruments of national power are combined to achieve these concepts. Unfortunately, the major areas of conflict for the U.S. in the past forty years were in third world countries, not against the Soviet Union or in Europe. U.S. operations in the third world during this period were marked by inconsistencies, overextending resources, and a general lack of strategic guidance for low intensity conflicts. The record of the U.S. in major involvements like Vietnam and El Salvador were marred by domestic dissent, agency infighting, and lack of guidance to Americans serving in the field.

On the surface it appears that the Soviet Union is lessening tensions with the U.S. and is embracing many of the U.S. ideals. The recent record of the Soviet Union contradicts what they are saying. The Soviet victories in Angola, garrisoning troops in Ethiopia, and supplying billions of dollars a year to Nicaragua in military aid, all during this period of detente demonstrate that the Soviet Union is not lessening tensions in the third world. The Soviet Union will not relinquish its role as the leader of the communist world. As such, it is committed to sponsoring wars of liberation throughout the third world.

During the last decade, the U.S. has undergone a self criticism of its organizational structure and strategy in the Low Intensity Conflict spectrum of war. The Congress has directed the President and the Department of Defense to reorganize and review U.S. preparations to operate in the LIC spectrum of war. Many

changes were made, but the most critical requirement, that of developing a mechanism for national strategy and execution in LIC, is still non-existent. Congress maintains the leadership in this restructuring in spite of the Constitutionally mandated requirement for the President to establish and execute foreign policy.

In order for the U.S. to meet the threat of new wars in the third world in the LIC spectrum, the President must initiate and organize a NSC level Board that will provide the needed strategic guidance for Low Intensity Conflict. This Board must deal at the national level with access to the President and Congress in order to gain a national consensus and provide a dynamic strategy that can change with the world situation.

When established and functioning the Board will provide the guidance and review of policy and strategy consistent with the resources the American citizens are willing to commit toward accomplishing the national objectives. The Soviet Union will continue to threaten the U.S. interests in the third world through the next decades. Preparing to meet the threat and organizing the U.S. resources in a systematic manner won't guarantee success, but at least a plan of action from which to depart will be known and understood by every American at home and in the field.

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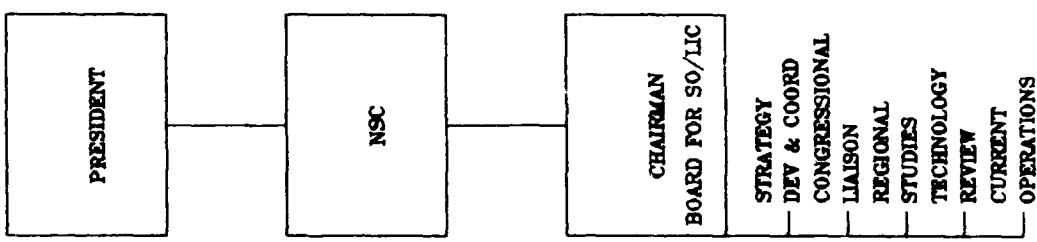
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# NSC BOARD FOR SO/LIC



ATTACHMENT 1